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LET'S GO WHERE THE ACTION IS !

Letters of Douglas Campbell to his Parents

July 22, 1917 to July 12, 1918

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LETTERS FROM DOUGLAS CAMPBELL TO HIS PARENTS.

July 22, 1917 to July 12, 1918

July 22, 1917.
(Message telephoned to room 679, Hotel Manhattan, New York)

Cannot see you tomorrow.
(Note: He was sailing on RMS "ORDUÑA"

(To his brother)

SS -------- (Censored)
At sea, Aug. 2, 1917

From: First Class Private D. Campbell, Aviation Section, Signal Corps, USA

To: 2nd Lieutenant W. Campbell, U.S.R.

Subject: Heifer Dust

1. I'm lucky as hell -- if Bill Hohenzollern's steel porpoises don't discover the "_____" (censored). If I'm any good as a flier I ought to have my 1st Lieutenant's commission by the end of September, and hope to be flying over Pershing's lines sometime in December. As I figure it out this bunch is in on the ground floor of the Aviation Service, and if we can make good the sky's the limit. It's a great opportunity.

2. Our greatest worry now is getting over. The "_____" is one of ___ troop ships which left Halifax last night (we lay there at anchor for a week, and didn't get any shore leave either); we are supposed to have a convoy, but haven't seen it yet. It will probably meet us in mid-ocean. The aviation men on this ship have been picked to act as submarine lookout. Half the outfit will be on guard every other 24 hours, working in three shifts with 2 hours on, 4 hours off.

3. Sorry I couldn't see you before I sailed, but hope to see you in Berlin next year if not before.

4. Don't know where we will land, but have a hunch it will be somewhere in France although some of the cargo is booked for Liverpool. I certainly hope we will, because it will waste less time. Speaking of the cargo, I believe we are carrying large (censored).

5. Don't know where the flying school is, but
Aviation School, American Expeditionary Force, France
ought to reach me.

P. S. After I get to be a 1st Lieut. I won't have to write such formal letters to officers.

R.M.S. "____"
At Sea, Aug. 6, 1917

The (censored) sailed from New York at 3:00 p.m. on July the 23rd, and arrived in Halifax two days later. We lay at anchor there for a week, and it was deadly stupid, for couldn't get shore leave, and there isn't much to do on board. But last Wednesday, just as our patience had reached the end of its rope, we set sail, accompanied by ____ (censored) ___ in the meantime. This is the 5th day out, and it is getting rough. I think we are pretty far north, for we ran northeast all day yesterday and are still keeping a course north of east. No information is available as to our route, but the general hunch is that we are to go around the north of Ireland and down through the North Channel to Liverpool. A (censored) is expected to meet us about (censored) and we hope to land by Friday night. Already, However, I have begun to stay in my stateroom as little as possible, and tomorrow I shall keep my life preserver with me at all times.

Ham Coolidge and I sneaked up after 12 o'clock last night and slept on lounges in the second class lounge (our accomodations are in second class, except for 3rd class food, but we can use any decks we want to); our staterooms are only 12 feet above the water line in the middle of the port side, and we don't feel much like sleeping in them when there may be submarines around.

This boat would be a great prize for the Germans, and they are certainly out to sink her if they can. Aside from (censored) she carries lots of (censored). The German sons of _____ would rather get her than any other of the (censored), because the captain has a price on his head; -- he has taken the (censored) times, and has rammed one submarine and dodged two torpedoes, one of which missed his stern by less than 50 feet.

We are all furnished with life preservers and are required to keep our canteens full of water. I am also carrying several bars of chocolate in my cartridge belt. Boat drill takes place every other day, and is now running smoothly, but of course you can't tell how the men will behave if the Germans shell the lifeboats, which they undoubtedly will if they get a chance. We have been told that we may expect to see submarines before our convoy meets us; -- that means tonight or tomorrow. Also a raider has been reported west of the Azores, headed this way. I think that is why we are heading so far to the north. Our train (censored) so it could easily catch us if it found us. After we meet (censored) and will go as rapidly as it can.

I know of no reason why I can't cable you if I land, but of course there may be some tight restrictions on cabling.

You were both perfectly splendid about making so little fuss over my going, and I appreciate it a lot. I have a feeling that I'll live through it if I once get landed in Europe, but should I fail to return I hope you will remember that it is merely a misfortune, not a calamity. For the value of a man's life to the progress of the world is measured not by its length in time, but by what it has accomplished; and if I do my part in everlastingly licking the Hohenzollerns I shall have accomplished more than I could in a life of a hundred years under ordinary conditions.

Rumor has it that our flying school is at (censored) and almost in the middle of France. But rumor is rumor. Even with the best of luck we won't be flying before the 15th-- a whole month after leaving the ground school.

P.S. The ship has begun to roll like thunder, and there is much weeping and wailing and snapping of lunches.

Liverpool, England
Sunday, Aug. 12, 1917

Landed about 2 hours ago

(rest of two paragraphs removed by censor)

It was just at twilight, and we were in the zone. A report was issued from the bridge, stating that the crow's nest had sighted our escort. About half an hour later, a light began blinking on the horizon, sending visual Morse

(censored)

about and went westward into the Irish Sea again, in order to kill time; they couldn't get into Liverpool until the tide was just right.

I am now in the customs house at Liverpool, waiting for the noon train which is to take us direct to Folkestone. We cross the Channel tonight, and ought to be in Paris in the morning. There we report to Pershing, and then -- bring on the airplanes!

While on board the (censored), we heard vague rumors that she had been reported lost by N.Y. papers. I hope you didn't let any unofficial reports worry you. Let me say in this connection, that if you ever hear that anything has happened to me, don't believe it unless you get official notification from the War Department.

P.S. Gosh! That was a long voyage. The time we were spending worried me more than the submarine menace. I wasn't really afraid of the subs, but it was always on one's mind.

Paris, Aug. 15, 1917

We had an interesting trip from Liverpool to Paris. Our train left Liverpool at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, and at 11:00 p.m. we got out at Folkestone and spent the night at a "rest-camp". Monday morning we went across to Boulogne in 1-1/2 hours, had lunch there and took a 2 o'clock train which arrived in Paris at 8 p.m. The Boulogne-Paris trip was extremely interesting. During the 1st half of the ride we were only 50 kilometers from the British front, and the military appearance of everything was inspiring. There were two

Belgian officers in my compartment who swore every time we saw a Boche prisoner.

Upon arriving at Paris, we were sent to the Caserne Reuilly, a barracks near the Bastille, but were allowed to spend the night elsewhere if we so desired. Ham Coolidge asked me to come with him to look up his uncle John Coolidge, who is attached to the embassy.

Yesterday noon we reported to the Caserne, and there I received a bad jolt, -- namely, that I shall not fly for at least 2 months. The majority of our bunch left for a flying school at Tours this morning and will start flying at once, but Eddie Bates, Ham Coolidge, Walker Ellis, Bill Ely, "Ike" Fearn, Gus Kissel, Aleck Matthews, John Mitchell, "Count" Hale, and myself are retained here for special duty. I was feeling terribly about it at first, for I thought they had decided to make non-flying officers of us, but since getting more dope on the situation I can see that it is a splendid opportunity for service and also advancement.

The ten of us are to be assistants to officers who are organizing on a large scale the American Air Service in France, and of the ten Ham Coolidge and I have been selected to help Capt. Miller organize, get in running order, and start running the huge aviation school at Issoudun. The buildings are now under construction, and an enormous number of airplanes are due to arrive before long. When in running order, the school will carry 5000 aviators at one time, and the program calls for turning out 6500 finished aviators by next July. So that's the job I'm starting in on, and as I know next to nothing about a flying school it will be a great game.

The best part of it is that our superior officers said this morning that they realized what a disappointment it must be to us not to fly at once, and that they intended to let us fly just as soon as the more important duties of organization are completed. Then, of course, we will be the bosses at the flying school, and can fly just as much as we darn please. Also, Ham and I will have to excercise considerable authority, so they are rushing our commission thru in a few days. We are ordering rather expensive uniforms, for dress counts a good deal over here, and we don't mean to be held back for that reason. That's why I am asking for some money.

When we have got the school going and have learned our flying, our officers said this morning, the chances are 10 to 1 that we'll go out to the front as commanders of squadrons.

What do you think of jumping from an insignificant private to 2nd or 3rd in command at the largest flying school in the world? It's a joke, but a mighty serious one. Active work begins tomorrow, and I truly hope it will be <u>difficult</u> as thunder. I'm tired of stalling for time.

(Author's note: Ah! the enthusiasn and optimism of youth!)

France, August 25, 1917

I wrote last Sunday, but the censor sent it back because of some minor infractions of rules, and I haven't had time to write since. I rather think that my first letter didn't get through either.

In case you haven't received any letters from me since I reached France, I'll state briefly that I'm not flying. All but a few of us went to a flying school and have been flying for 10 days, but we were told that our services were needed at headquarters to assist in serious problems of organization. It was an awful jolt at first, but the disappointment at not flying at once is overbalanced by three facts:

a. The work we are doing here is very important and of great benefit to the Air Service.

b. We hope to get commissions as 1st Lieutenants very soon.

c. In about 5 or 6 weeks I hope to be flying at a school where I shall be a member of the administrative staff and can fly as much as I please.

Ham Coolidge and Eddie Bates are working with me under the same officer on the same problem, and it's a whopper too. You would be greatly interested in it if I could tell you what it is, but that wouldn't get by. I hope to visit one of the great French schools next week in connection with it, and that will be awfully interesting.

Seven of our bunch are from the M.I.T. outfit, so we aren't strangers by any means. We are living at a small hotel on the left bank of the river just now (Author's note: the Hotel de l'Universite), but expect soon to move into a pension in another part of town so as to be nearer the office.

Received your train letters today, the first I have received since leaving N.Y. My mail was sent to the flying school and had to be returned, so it was delayed.

We shall probably receive two months' pay in a week or 10 days, so I won't need any money. I have been so busy that I haven't had time to look around for people to help along as father wants me to, but will do so when I get out into the country in October. In a city it is very difficult to find the right place to spend it. If my commission goes thru, I'll have enough to distribute, live on, and then some, so you needn't worry about sending any.

I hear that week-end cables are very cheap. Shall look into the matter on Monday.

Saturday, Sept. 1, 1917

Have been very busy this week, and the work is progressing well enough considering the difficulties we are up against. Because of the shortage of tonnage, we are forced to do most of our business over here, and it certainly is difficult. It is impossible to convince a Frenchman that you really mean it when you say you are in a hurry. Since coming over here I have begun to realize why the French are not able to accomplish more against the Germans. Even after three years of war the men at home don't know how to work with efficiency and concentration, and materials are wasted a great deal. Probably the race will never get over the habit of talking instead of doing, although the men in the trenches are splendid in that respect.

Last Sunday we all moved into a pension, but today we are moving out again. The reason we are moving so soon is that we have all been driven crazy by the nonsensical jabbering of the French landlady and her spinsterous daughter. We are all agreed that when we eat our meals we prefer to eat in peace rather than to be constantly talked at. Why can't some people get along without intoxication of the tongue?

We are moving into what appears to be a very pleasant hotel just around the corner from the office. (Author's note: The Hotel Francois I, on the Rue Francois I. The hotel no longer exists.) It is a little more expensive, but we avoid the "family stuff" which is so annoying at the pension. We shall soon be able to afford a little more, too, for we were recommended for commissions as 1st Lieuts. by the board yesterday and are informed they will be confirmed by cable in about two weeks. Temporarily, of course, we shall be on a non-flying status, but when our well known and justly famous establishment gets running in (censored), we ought to have plenty of opportunities for flying.

It is my ambition to be flying in the first squadron that takes a place behind the lines. I want to be one of the men who win aerial supremacy from the Germans, not merely one of those who maintain what has been won by the first ones on the job.

Yesterday I read that Wilson had got around the Goethals-Denman snarl, but I haven't been able to find out how he did it. I hope he kicked them both out and gave them h--l; everybody over here realizes keenly that we need shipping right off and a lot of it, and anyone that held back a whole program for 2 months because of his personal bull-headedness ought to be shot. I don't know who was nearer the right, but certainly time was the important thing and still is. "Don't count on getting anything from America if you want it within the next six months", is the consensus of opinion in our office; and the number of things that must come from America is appalling when observed in that light.

But we're going to show the Germans up when we get going!

France, Sept. 5, 1917

There is practically nothing to relate about happenings since last Sunday. Work is going on as usual, and you would be very much interested in it if I could tell you any details, but I can't. We hope to get our establishment running on time if the States can give us any assistance at all in furnishing certain supplies.

Outlook on commissions has improved. Letters from our superior officers went to the Adjutant General yesterday, and he should cable Washington in a day or two. It will probably take two weeks to get a reply.

Sugar is very scarce over here, consequently you can't get really good eating chocolate. One or two shredded wheats would also be gladly received; it wouldn't matter if they smashed on the way.

Sunday, Sept. 9, 1917

Well, I haven't flown yet, worse luck, but on Friday I visited a testing field outside the city, and saw a few real aeroplanes. Only a person who has seen some of these French machines know what a real "avion" looks and acts like. Very small Nieuport and Spad scouts were going up and coming down all the time, and they certainly were immense. One fellow in a Spad came down to within 100 ft. of the ground and then flew horizontally, tail high, with the motor wide open. He was going about 120 - 130 miles per hour; then he pulled back on his elevator and let the machine shoot up 150 ft. at an angle of 45° before he levelled her off again. The power of that thing is enormous. It made me wilder than ever to get into a machine and get some instruction -- but my luck doesn't seem to run that way.

The officers at headquarters are getting some flying at this testing field very soon. Three of our bunch have flown in America, and will probably get some flying with the officers, but I doubt if they'll undertake to train an absolute hick like me. It will be rather hard to see fellows in my bunch going to fly while I am left behind for the third time, but I'm glad somebody is going to get some flying. I don't believe anyone has ever been so intensly eager to do anything as I have been to fly during the last six months, but it seems as if all possible obstacles have been put in my path in this respect.

Work has been going splendidly for the last few days. A lot of apparently insurmountable obstacles are in a fair way to flatten themselves out, due chiefly to the fact that they didn't exist except in erroneous reports. Example: After we had been told by all the men who should be posted on the subject, that a certain type of supply was absolutely unobtainable this side of the Atlantic, a man walked into the purchasing department, said he had in France a perfectly incredible amount of the stuff, and wanted to know if we could use any. That same sort of thing happened three times this week.

Sunday, September 16, 1917

Was it Saturday that I last wrote? On Sunday Gus Kissel and I took a pretty poor excuse for a train and went to one of the suburbs, where we walked through a part of the Gardens and forests that Louis the Quince used to try to enjoy. Now, of course, it is a sort of public park like the Bois de Balloons, and it was crowded with all sorts of interesting people, from singing mendicants to French Commandants.

The actual work on our main job hasn't been very heavy this week, so Ham Coolidge and Eddie Bates and I have been spending most of our time in making arrangements for the Officers' flying field at _____. Several machines were delivered on Monday, and we were sent down to receive them and have them put in our hangars. I don't know how our officers expected three enlisted men to stalk up to a French captain and claim about a hundred thousand dollars worth of airplanes without even a letter authorizing them to do so, but we've been sent to do so many things like that, that it didn't bother us any, and at the expense of about 6 telephone calls and several barrels of very poorly spoken French, we finally managed to make off with the boodle to our end of the "piste". I have been looking up tools and spare parts for the last few days, and Ham has been furnishing our mechanics with food, raiment, and where to lay their heads.

On Thursday the Chief received an airplane from England, and one of the officers took a flight that afternoon. Friday there was some flying, and yesterday Lt. Stevenson flew one of the slower Nieuports. But the flying is reserved for the elite, so we won't possibly get any until our commissions come; and it probably won't do me any good then, for a lot of machines are going up from different parts of the field, and they say it's too dangerous for school work. If we could get one of the officers who can fly to get up at about 5 a.m. and get to the field about 6, it would be perfectly safe, for I was there early the other morning, and not a single machine went up before 8:00; but who wants to get up at that hour just to teach a green man how to fly?

While I was at the field yesterday, they tested a new type of chasse machine, and it certainly looked good. The pilot knew how to ride his broncho pretty well too, for he put her through some great paces. The other men in our bunch said I was crazy when I told them I saw it do a vertical bank and climb at the same time, but it's true. Gosh! I'd give anything to be an expert pilot and have a chance to fly a bus like that!

Was very sorry to hear of Charlie Fleischman's fall. But it can happen to anyone. Bill Meeker, who you remember came over in May to join the Lafayette Escadrille, was killed at Pau on Tuesday. I believe his motor quit on him when he was doing "stuff" too close to the ground. If I ever get to fly, I think caution will be my middle name when I am under 800 ft. Up high, it must be fun to do things, but this near-the-ground stuff is only spectacular and doesn't get you anything.

Sunday, Sept. 23, 1917

Tuesday afternoon one of the officers was kind enough to take me up for a 17-minute joy-ride in a Nieuport of the type next to the smallest in wing surface. It was perfectly fascinating, for the country here is exquisitely beautiful when viewed from the air. A patch-work quilt of fields of different shades of green; dark green, velvety patches of forest land; the winding river and the city on its banks; little red and green roofs peeping out here and there from the green of the country districts; all went to make up a marvellous picture. France is ideal from the air; -- the beauty of it all is visible, but not the dirt. We seemed to stand still while this beautiful landscape passed beneath us; then we would turn, banking steeply, and the pressure against the bank of air gave one a sense of the great speed at which the avion was traveling; a famous palace and its woods and gardens passed beneath us, -- another sharp turn, -- a side gust tipping us to one side for a moment, -- a "bump", -- the roar of the rotary motor, -- everything put together was simply treeemendous! Gosh! I wish I were an experienced pilot and could do that every day! The best part of all was coming down in great "S's"; long steep glides with a horseshoe turn at each end, like the roads over the Alpine passes.

Last night Ham Coolidge, Eddie Bates, Ike Fearn, Gus Kissel, Count Hale, and I went to the movies, and during the intermission I met Sous-Lieutenant William Crocker of the French Artillery, and Miss Ethel Crocker. We were all delighted to see scenes of the San Jose Round-Up on the screen in the Pathe Weekly.

Sunday, Sept. 30, 1917

Things are looking brighter! We expect to leave here Friday for that place you guessed in your last letter, and we expect to start about 10 days after that. It is to be an advanced school with pretty fast equipment, so Capt. Miller says he will try to arrange for me to get my elementary work at a French school about 20 miles southwest of there, on slower apparatus. If all goes well I ought to be hopping every day within ten days.

Also, the Chief of our department is reported to have said yesterday that he didn't want us to be tied up in administrative jobs any longer than necessary, for it was important that we get our training and get to the front as soon as possible. That is certainly good news to us!

Yesterday I saw some splendid flying. Two machines of new types were racing each other, looping, tail-spinning, and trying to see how close they could come to roofs of hangars without hitting them.

This morning we had to get up and down to the office by 8 o'clock to be mustered for payroll. On the way back to the hotel, we ran across a man who was carrying small baskets and yelling "Petits fraises!" at the top of his voice. We immediately piled on him and

each bought a basket of his wild strawberries. Then Ham and Bill Ely and I discovered a butter-eggs-and-cheese store and bought some thick cream and some sugar. We certainly had some breakfast at the hotel.

Our commissions are still almost here, as they have been for almost two weeks. Last week they were sent to this office for the third time when only twice was necessary, and Lord knows what has happened to them now. The system is fearfully and wonderfully made. Apparently the examining board, which is the only body which ever sees the candidates, has less to say about it than anyone else. I hope they'll arrive before next Friday, because if we are to be on the administrative staff at the school, it wouln't be very effective to arrive at the school as a private and not become an officer until after everyone had got used to seeing you as an enlisted man. But I'm not kicking, for it won't do any good, and if I can get my training I'd just as leave be a water-carrier if necessary.

Must stop and do a little work. Sunday isn't always a day of no work.

France, Sunday, Oct. 7, 1917

We didn't start south on Friday as planned, for there were various matters that could not be finished to our satisfaction until last night. The Captain is leaving today, and Ham and I will go tomorrow; Eddie Bates is to remain here for a few days to see that our supplies get shipped. We are not going to trust to railroad service, but are having everything urgent sent down on trucks. If we open the 15th we have a hard week ahead of us.

All of us received our commissions as First Lieutenants on Wednesday the 3rd, were sworn in that evening and appeared all dressed up on Thursday morning. It really was very pleasant to be considered a gentleman and to feel like one again after having been more or less of a tramp and office boy for many weeks; although we had been treated splendidly by most of the officers here, as an enlisted man you feel decidedly inferior to any officer. I think our having been enlisted, however, makes us appreciate better the privileges and duties of an officer.

Five of our number leave this morning to take charge of detachments and get their own training in a well-known island which I travelled across 8 weeks ago. I am hoping to make arrangements to start training this week at the place I spoke of in my last letter (Ch--------x).

I received your draft for Fr. 577, for which I am much obliged. I have plenty of money now, and since I can't spend much at camp and will be closer to the French people, I hope to carry out your instructions as to charity, which I have been unable to do here. My pay will be about $185. - per month for the present, and about $220.- monthly when I have officially become what I came over here to be, so I should

have no trouble in doing it, unless it arises from being too busy to spend enough time on it.

Conditions at camp will probably not be too pleasant at first, as it will be quite cold and extremely muddy when it rains. But we have some nice barracks ready, and I have spent quite a lot on high trench boots, coats, and other things, so don't worry about my taking care of myself. The government will furnish us with flying suits that have fur linings, electric heaters, hot and cold running water, elevators, fireless cookers, and all sorts of things.

No letters this week; the boat they are on must be spending a week or two in Halifax.

Instruction Detachment No. 3
Air Service, A.E.F., Oct. 10, 1917.

Arrived here day before yesterday. Ham and I came down in the train with Capt. Pellissier, our Chef Pilote. He is a corker. We were met by a truck, a motorcycle, and a drizzling rain. Mud about 4 inches deep all around the buildings. Comfortable officers' quarters, food excellent and American in style -- griddle cakes for breakfast, corn bread, jam, etc. Hope to open school next Monday. My flying at Ch----x has not yet been arranged for, but hope it will be soon. Spent yesterday p.m. in riding around on motorcycle all over the fields, taking Capt. P. in side car to observe their conditions and note improvements to be made. We have lots of Boche labor here. If we have good flying weather, the life here will be ideal, -- air, exercise, flying, fine sleep. Great change from that office work in the last town I was in. I was getting no exercise, and didn't sleep well. If you can, send me a pair of knitted sox (long ones, reaching almost to knee) about once a month. I have plenty now, but they disappear if not replenished.

France, Oct. 14, 1917

The weather continues to be pretty rotten, although flying could have been done most of this morning. We hope to start tomorrow, but troubles have come thick and fast, so we shall open on an extremely small scale compared to that which we had hoped for. Red tape, army methods, and the French idea of being on time are the cause of most of the troubles. Apparently the Germans are the only ones who don't go on the principle: "when in doubt or difficulty, wait and see what happens."

For lack of someone who knows something about the job, I am to be Adjutant of this organization. Aside from being the mouthpiece of the commanding officer, I am to run the military end of the camp, see that messing and living arrangements are O.K., keep the personnel cheerful, run the headquarters office force, deal out punishments, and 101 other little things. I don't know a great deal about the paper work, but I shall have a good sergeant who knows it all, and it is all

common sense anyway, so it doesn't bother me much. I seem to have inherited enough common sense to carry me this far, so why worry? (No charge for that compliment.)

As far as my flying is concerned, I guess that will come along soon, although it may take years and years on account of the rotten weather. I did hate to see good weather go to waste to-day, though, without being able to use it. After we get this place started, everything will be secondary to flying. If it clears up just before lunch-time, the order "To h--l with lunch" will be issued, and the 3rd Aviation Instruction Detachment will forget its meal until it has finished flying. That's the only way we can turn out pilots during the winter.

Your packages of grub haven't arrived yet, but they will be extremely welcome when they do blow in. If it gets here, I'll let you know, and if it isn't too expensive and troublesome you can send some small packages again. I don't like to have anything bulky sent, because every bit of tonnage saved means harder swats at the Boche.

October 21, 1917

Last Monday I began my flying instruction on a double controlled Nieuport, 23 sq. meters wing surface, 80 H.P. Le Rhone motor, Sgt, Billiet, an excellent instructor, has been training me, and I have been up every day since Monday except Thursday, when it was raining. We go up for three circuits in the morning and three in the afternoon, totaling about 1/2 hour per day in the air. It is the most fascinating and absorbing game I have ever tackled; it is a real problem which involves eyes, ears, nerves, delicate touch, a lot of brain, and a sixth sense which is called "air sense", which consists in knowing, by feeling the machine, whether it is in the right position or not. I am now going through the stage of discouragement which every student experiences at various times. Day before yesterday I thought I was pretty good, but yesterday I discovered that I wasn't. All the men who are flyers tell me it is a good sign, for when you get so you know something is wrong, you are well on the road toward doing it right. Billiet is a corking moniteur: when the air is calm, he takes his hands off the stick and lets me see that they are off, and since I can feel the pressure of the rudder on my right foot, I know I am doing it all. Then if I am doing something wrong which does not need instant correction, he signals with his hands so I can do it myself. I am still unable to do very well with the landings, but hope to learn soon. Capt. Pelissier says I am doing very well, particularly as I am learning on the machine on which French pilots are perfected <u>after</u> they have flown for some time alone on slower avions.

On Friday I fooled them all. One of the difficult things with piloting a Nieuport is getting off the ground. They have a long, rather heavy fuselage (or body), and when you are starting off the tail tries to swing to one side or the other, and if you don't stop it by using your rudder, the machine will swing around. This is called a "cheval de bois", and will sometimes tip you over and smash

the machine before you leave the ground. The rudder movements must sort of anticipate the swing, for if you correct a swing to the right and leave the rudder hard over, you will have a cheval de bois to the left. In order to train pilots against chevaux de bois, they have "rouleurs" or "penguins", little monoplanes with wings clipped short, so they can't leave the ground. These rouleurs are much more touchy than a regular airplane, and generally go around in circles, turn over, smash up, or do most anything the first time you try to run one. Well, on Friday they decided to let me smash the first rouleur, so I got in one, had the motor started, received last instructions, and started off. The other fellows and the French pilots expected to see me spin around and do everything else, and were expecting at least a good laugh if not an accident. To their great, and my even greater, surprise, I found the rudder work easy and the elevator manipulation nearly so, and ran the fool thing in almost a straight line. The next time, I tried it faster, and that went well too. When I stopped, I was informed that I had "roule comme un as". If I can only improve my air work and landing now, I may fly in a little while.

This morning's mist seems to be starting to burn off a bit, so I'll have to stop and aller chercher my air togs.

Air Service, A.E.F.
Nov. 3, 1917

Excuse me for not having written last Sunday, I had a lot of things to do, and didn't get around to it.

The weather has been pretty rotten this week, so flying has gone slowly. Yesterday I had three very nice hops, and on the last one the instructor didn't touch any of the controls except the throttle. He says I can go alone after two or three more jumps like that. As luck would have it, a heavy mist is preventing flying this morning, but I hope to take my last bit of double control work this afternoon. I am anxious to get to solo work, for it is then that you really teach yourself to fly and develop your own style of flying.

I have been relieved as adjutant of this post, for which I am duly thankful. The job would have got me into a rut of army red tape, which I would have been obliged to learn as I went along, and it would have interfered seriously with my flying. I am convinced that the men who can fly <u>well</u> <u>first</u> are the ones who will be able to do the most for the Cause in the air service. Military promotion is not entirely a matter of ability, and I have no desire to be a lieutenant dressed up as a general. The highest ranking man in the Air Service is the Ace, even if he draws a private's pay, and when I have achieved that distinction through my own efforts I shall begin to think about being a leader in other matters.

Got some nice letters from you this week, also a delightful post card from one K. Campbell '21. "Give 'em hell! So long, Ken" is the way he winds up.

Nov. 10, 1917

Many thanks for the packages of chocolate and shredded wheat. They are great.

Last Sunday a large number of men blew in here, and as we didn't have enough space in which to house them, flying was called off for a week. (Note: Flying cadets and officers were put to work building barracks, and nicknamed themselves The Royal Flying Carpenters.) Didn't make much difference, anyway, for it has been raining a lot. Probably it did me good too, for I was just in a rotten streak when we quit, and I've had time to forget about it. I hope to start in well, day after tomorrow, and start flying alone in a few days.

This week I have been in command of a squadron of mechanics, but now I have been relieved so as to work on the flying end.

Letters seem to be awfully scarce over here sometimes, but then at other times 6 or 8 will come in a bunch.

With this job on the flying staff, I hope to have time to enjoy the country and people about me a little more. For the last month I have been so busy doing jobs and being efficient that I have sort of fallen into a rut. But now, being in charge of flying records, I won't be overworked in bad weather, will I?

Nov. 18, 1917

Well, I feel happier today than I have for some time. On Thursday afternoon my moniteur in the double control pronounced me ready for solo work; but Friday we had bad weather, so I didn't try it that day. Yesterday about noon the fog lifted to about 300 meters, and flying began at 1:30. The French chief pilot, who was worried about me, insisted on my taking one more ride in double control, and as luck would have it I made a perfect landing. After waiting around for half an hour or so while the single control machines were brought out, I heard my name called, and was told to take machine No. 15. I climb in, fastened the strap securely, received last instructions from the chief pilot (he was pretty scared by this time, for, according to him, it is the first time in France that anyone has done his first flying in a machine of that speed), and told the mechanic to start the motor. About six other students held the wings while I tested the motor, which turned up beautifully; then I throttled it down, and they left the machine free. The chief pilot signalled me to start, I pulled back on the throttle lever, and off I went. The machine felt surprisingly lighter, with only one person in it, and left the ground very quickly. When I got into the air, I felt as if I had been there all my life. It didn't seem very difficult, for the air was reasonably calm, and the avion practically flew itself. I made a tour of the field just under the "ceiling" (clouds), making turns to the left. It was a most exhilarating feeling to be in absolute control of the machine, and is the best fun I ever had. I didn't really know whether I would judge the field just right on landing or not, but managed to land within three or four hundred feet of the place I tried to hit.

The landing was nothing to write home about, as it was rather bumpy but I didn't break anything. I took another ride for a few minutes later, but the landing wasn't much better.

The chief pilot had a grin on from one ear to the other, and said he felt very much relieved. I'm not a flyer yet by any means, you understand, but at least I have passed the first test on a fairly difficult machine.

Thursday, Nov. 22, 1917

Rather funny, my writing in the middle of the week, isn't it? I am in charge of flying records, and there hasn't been any flying for two days on account of fog, so I'm not very busy.

I have had all kinds of luck. On Monday, I had three trips in the large machine I learned on, and all the starts and landings were perfect, so I was pronounced ready for the next class. Tuesday morning I started on a machine having about 45 sq. ft. less wing surface, and which goes considerably faster. I found it really a lot easier to fly and land, although I had myself pretty well scared once. The first machine I took up was badly adjusted, so that it tried to tip to the right all the time, and when I made a right turn I felt a violent wind in the side of my face, and discovered that I was side slipping. A wood of evergreens seemed to be jumping up to meet me, so that altogether it was a bit annoying. But I caught myself before I had fallen more than 50 or 75 feet, and after that it went fine, except that when I was gliding down my goggles were too loose, and were flapping all over my face. The landing was perfect, however, and I borrowed some better ones before going up again.

In the afternoon I had 7 trips, and all the landings were perfect. I tried some vertical turns, that is, sharp turns with the machine banked up so that the wings were vertical rather than horizontal; but it was really a bit dangerous, as the clouds prevented my going higher than 1000 ft., so I contented myself with only 2 or 3. After my 6th landing, I was pronounced ready to take up the scout the next day. I am crazy to fly it, for it is said to handle very delicately, and it lands quite rapidly, but the last two days have been foggy, so I haven't had my chance yet. Imagine flying a 110-miles-per-hour machine after having had only 2 hours experience alone in the air! It sounds absurd, but the monitors say I am ready for it, and I am perfectly confident that I can fly it.

Ken's packages of shredded wheat and chocolate are arriving regularly, and are certainly appreciated. I would object to using shipping space for luxuries, but I think anything edible has a right to come over here if it wants to.

In my last letter I was so wild on the subject of flying, that I forgot to tell you of the party we had a week ago last Sunday. Capt. Miller, Capt Meyer, Ham Coolidge, and I had Sunday dinner at the Chateau of General Exelman, about 30 miles from here. It was a Chateau built in the late 1400's, fitted up and improved in splendid taste.

The General and his wife set us up to a perfectly wonderful meal, with all kinds of hors d'oeuvres and three meat courses, not to mention about four kinds of wine, including champagne and most delicious Burgundy. These French people certainly are sensible in their method of drinking. They give you small amounts of different kinds of wines that they have had in the cellar for about 50 years, and they drink it just as one would eat a particularly rare dish of some sort.

There were 3 or 4 very attractive young ladies present, one of whom made a tremendous hit with Ham. Our French was really quite adequate for the occasion, and also improved a great deal in the process of the afternoon. We discovered a landing field near the place, so we are expecting Ham to have a "panne de chateau" when he makes a cross-country flight. (Panne = breakdown or motor failure).

The General's grandfather was one of Napoleon's Marechals and the General took great pride in showing us many interesting relics, among which was an epaulet worn by Nap. at Waterloo.

Hooray! Clouds are breaking up. Hope they'll be all gone in the morning.

Friday: Flew the scout 3 times this morning. It surely is a bird! Climbs like thunder, goes to beat h--l, and is tricky to land. (Note: He is referring to the Nieuport 24, - 15sq. meters wing surface.)

Tuesday, Nov. 27

I didn't write on Sunday, because I had written Thursday and not much had happened since. On Saturday and Sunday there was absolutely no flying on account of rain.

Yesterday, however, was a beautiful day. I was one of the men to fly a scout from the hangars to the flying field used by that class, and as I got an early start I had time to climb a couple of thousand feet and take a nice little ride before the other men got there. The sun was just rising as I left the ground, the air was without mist though a bit hazy, the temperature was down around 5° or 6° C., and the ship was running perfectly. The view from about 2200 feet, of this beautiful flat country, still green, with its square fields, dark green woods, and white straight roads, was perfectly enchanting. I felt as if I owned the earth. After a few minutes I tried the first spirals I ever did, 3 turns to the left and the same to the right, and it sure was fun. I had her banked over rather steeply, and was above a little farm, so it seemed as if my wing tip was pivoted on the farmhouse, while the earth turned under me and I stood still. Later in the morning I had three more rides, short ones, and a longer one just before twilight. My landings weren't too good, but they were difficult to make, as there was a gusty wind which was quite treacherous.

There will be no flying on Thanksgiving, so I should like to go to Paris on leave, particularly as I have an invitation to the reception at the American Embassy; but I want to go up with Ham when I go, and he went on a cross-country flight yesterday and got lost, and can't get back today on account of the weather.

I find that a man has to sleep a lot when he is flying; you don't feel much of a strain when you are up, but if you stay up long you feel quite tired half an hour after landing, and if you don't get enough sleep you are all off the next day. I have been sleeping from 9 to 6 every night for three weeks, except when it rains in the morning, and then I sleep until 8.

That reminds me that I wish I had asked you about 2 months ago to get me a bedding roll with about 3 first class blankets; but I'll need it sooner than you could get it now, so I'll buy one in Paris. If Wad comes over, make him bring a cot and a good warm bedding roll with him. Cots that you can carry around are scarce as hen's teeth, and good blankets cost like thunder.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Dec. 1, 1917

Can't remember when I last wrote; about Tuesday, I guess. Thanksgiving was a holiday at this post, which was a crime, because the weather was flyable. Yesterday it was punk again, except late in the p.m., and there was a monthly muster going on, so there was no flying then. This morning it cleared up at about 10, and we flew for an hour and a half. I was the first man up in the scout class and it sure was pretty. There was still a slight mist up to 100 meters, so that below that point you could see the ground but coulnd't see out to the sides; but it only took a few seconds to roar up through that, and above that the air was perfectly clear as far as the ceiling, which was at about 1200 meters. I had 4 rides, the last one fairly long, and 3 of the landings were pretty good. The scout is hard to land, it is so light and so delicate on the elevator control.

This afternoon we didn't fly, because some big gun came down from Paris to inspect this post (I wish we didn't have so many military interruptions, but I think that was the last for awhile); but I am still a good grafter even in this line of activity, and am as keen after flights as I used to be after auto rides when I was a kid. This morning when flying stopped, I noticed that one of the little scouts was laid up with a broken shock absorber, and as it was on a field quite distant from the hangars, I immediately chased up the engineering officer (Note: Probably Eddie Rickenbacker) and asked if I could fly it back when it was fixed. He said O.K., so this p.m. at 3 I went out, found three mechanics who had fixed it, inspected the wires, planes, landing gear, etc., climbed in, and started off. The sky was entirely overcast, but the air below

the ceiling was clear as crystal, and I could see for miles. This is the first time I had been free from the restrictions necessarily placed on one when flying in classes, so I decided to have some good fun. I climbed until I hit the clouds (1300 meters by the altimeter), and then did a couple of "vrilles". To do this you cut the motor, stall the machine by pointing it up, and then throw the rudder and ailerons to the same side. The machine hovers a moment, then falls nose down, turning rapidly on the wing tip as a pivot. After it has turned a few times, you put all controls in neutral and wait. In a very short time the whirling ceases, and you find yourself diving down vertically; then all you have to do is pull back on the stick, gradually so as not to wreck the wings by subjecting them to too great a strain, and turn on the motor, and the machine is flying level again. It sure is fun, but it would be dangerous under 600 meters, for you lose altitude very rapidly. I also tried some vertical turns, but find I need much more practice on them, for they are very difficult to do withour losing altitude by slipping sidewise.

The end of my flight was quite dramatic and decidedly satisfactory. I cut the motor at 700 meters and took a straight glide to the landing T (a white canvas T with the cross-bar against the wind); by rare good luck I made a perfect landing within 25 yards of the T, and then discovered that the Chief Pilot, the post commander, several French pilots, and a visiting officer from the French War Office were watching me. Capt. Pelissier (Chief Pilot) had been wondering who the pilot was, and was simply tickled to death when said person crawled out of his helmet and goggles and proved to be the most inexperienced flyer in the school.

I don't entirely approve of talking about myself and my flying, particularly as an aviator who does most of his flying with his mouth is more or less of a sin to be avoided; but probably you don't mind it, and I must say that I have never been so satisfied with myself as I am after flying. I have for some months considered this particular machine I'm flying as something I could never reach, and to be able to fly it passably well is a great satisfaction. Fortunately for me, I am at the same time able to realize that I still have a long way to go to become an expert, but to have got this far is something.

Whenever I write you, I wish I had Wad's ability to describe events and sensations accurately, so I could let you know something about the joys of flying. As soon as you get into the machine, every single worry you ever had -- and we've had some here -- simply vanishes. When you open the throttle, and the tremendous power sets you in motion, you can't think about anything else, because while you are ripping along the ground you have to be on the alert so as not to swing sidewise or get your tail too high and turn over. Then when you are in the air, the panorama of this beautiful world, which looks better every time you go up, unfolds itself under you and gives you a thrill of delight which lasts for a long time. Coming down seems more like one's preconceived notion of flying than anything else, because the motor is silent, and you are simply floating down. But you don't have much time to enjoy that part of it, for you are busy picking that landing field, judging your height and distance, keeping the

nose straight into the wind and, later, leveling off before the ground hits you, and keeping the wheels just off the ground while you lower the tail and make the angle of incidence greater and greater as you lose speed, until you can't stay in the air longer, and touch the ground as lightly as a feather -- sometimes.

Poor old Ham tried to come home Thursday from his cross-country trip, had a forced landing, and hit a small tree with one wing tip. Didn't get a scratch himself, but the machine was all smashed up, and he has been badly kidded ever since.

Same Place, Dec. 4, 1917.

Just a short one to let you know what a lot of fun I am having. Yesterday I took an altitude test, going up to 4000 meters and remaining there 15 minutes. Started up at 7:30 a.m., when there was frost on the ground. My fingers haven't entirely recovered from the cold yet. It was great up there, though. The horizon was just the same height as ever, but gosh what an area it included!

Today, started out on my first cross-country flight, leaving at 7:40 a.m. for T---, the place I was to have gone if I hadn't been kept in Paris. Perfectly wonderful ride, -- sailed along at 1000 meters, over woods, winding rivers, chateaux, and little towns, and didn't lose my way for a moment. I covered the 80-odd miles in 50 minutes, then came down in a vrille and steep spirals, making a landing 75 feet from a hanger (closer than I had intended, I must admit). The other 4 men who went over arrived a little later, and a couple of them broke tail skids or tires on landing, so I had to stay a couple of hours to make arrangements for repairs. Had the steed fed and lubricated, started back at 11, arrived here at 12:10, just in time for lunch, making perfect landing. It's surely the way travel, -- the auto is passe.

Start acrobatics tomorrow, in machines specially strengthened to avoid accident if overstrained.

Paris, Friday, Dec. 14

The weather was bad today, and promised to be bad tomorrow, and we don't fly on Sunday, so I got leave for 48 hours and came here to buy some things I need very badly.

Arrived at 7, had a bully feed, and expect to sleep like thunder until 7 a.m., when I shall be called for a <u>hot bath</u>, -- the first in 8 weeks.

Flying has been going very nicely. I am now flying a new type of scout, the same size, but with as many H.P. as there are miles between you and Half Dome (Note: 110), and with a flatter curve of wing section which requires greater speed to sustain the machine. It lands at about 55 miles per hour, I should say. (Note: Nieuport 27).

I have finished my acrobatics, but instead of sending me on to aerial fire and then to the front, they're going to keep me in charge of one of the fields for 3 or 4 months! Wouldn't that be enough to get anybody's goat? It seems as if the more conscientious workers always get more work of the slacker type shoved on them, while the loafers get what they want. I'm going to stop being so useful -- it only gets you in deeper than before in work you don't give a hang about.

I hear Ken Smith (Note: a former schoolmate) is in Paris, and am going to look him up tomorrow. He is a naval flyer, and recently was lost at sea for 60 hours while hunting submarines, and came near passing out for lack of food.

Monday, Dec. 17, 1917

Failed to mail you the small letter in Paris, so am sending it now. Saturday morning I did all my shopping, discovered Ken Smith in the same hotel as myself, and worked a terrific graft.

You remember that when I was in Paris they got up a flying field just outside the city, where only the officers attached to headquarters are allowed to fly. Well, I heard 10 days ago that they had a couple of the famous Spads there now, and I was all for flying one. I looked up the lieutenant (Note: Joe Trees) in charge of the flying, who I happened to know, and by being more or less diplomatic got permission to go out in the p.m. and try it.

I arrived at the field at 2:30, and had to wait until 3:40 before some others were through flying the Spads; then I got in and sailed away. Almost immediately after leaving the ground the terrific wind blew off my helmet and goggles, so experienced the delightful sensation of finding one's self in an unknown machine of very high speed, not knowing whether or not one would be able to see the ground when it was time to land. I stayed up only 10 minutes, for it was getting dark, then came down and had the good luck to make a perfect landing. The wind didn't bother my eyes at all on the way down. It sure was some sensation to land at 70 or 75 miles per hour, and the power of that motor when climbing was simply immense. (Note: 180 H.P.)

Saturday night Ken Smith, Pierre Fauville (one of our monitors here, a French flying Lieutenant, nickname "Tagadac") and I had a wonderful dinner at Maxim's and went to the theatre. Sunday I slept all morning, had a much needed hot bath, and returned here late in the afternoon.

This morning I started off by hitting a ditch on landing, and breaking part of the landing gear. Not a bad accident, but rather annoying.

Next time you are in town, please buy 2 of Spalding's "Bike" Jockey Straps and send them to me. Some of the flyers at the front have

occcsionally frozen certain parts of their anatomy doing high patrols in cold weather, and these straps also afford considerable protection in case of a smash. I can't find any good ones on this side.

(undated)

I have certainly had a splendid Xmas. On Monday there was a reorganization of the mechanical force, so there were no regular flying classes going on, and I had time to do a lot of flying on the machine that has been assigned to my use. In the morning I went up to about 2300 meters and spent a lot of time practising sharp turns and perfecting them. I spend about an hour at this, then spiralled down and landed. It was a wonderful day, the ground covered with about 3 inches of snow and the sky perfectly clear. That afternoon I took a little trip to a little town about 60-70 kilometers north of here (Note: Romorantin), returning without landing there. The trip took about an hour, and it was certainly beautiful. Once on the way back I could see the sun shining in 6 places on the same winding river, although the clouds were between the sun and myself.

Ham and I have moved to a new barrack, in which there is a small stove in each room, -- a great luxury, for we have had weather below freezing for a week or more. Xmas morning, Ham started a fire at 6 o'clock, and when we decided to get up, at 8:30, the room was nice and warm. We had all our Xmas packages on a table between us, and opened them before getting dressed. Grandmother's "Jokes and Journeys" certainly takes the prize. I never enjoyed a book more in my life. When I opened it and found that picture of the Indians staring me in the face, I almost gave up the ghost right there. G M is the original Sense of Humor, without a doubt. The Thorps also sent me a book of Manch photos, which had a similar effect on my laughing apparatus.

Before noon I refereed an inter-squadron football game, then ate an enormous Xmas dinner, and spent the afternoon and evening doing absolutely nothing except sitting around the stove exercising my mouth and lungs.

Thanks a lot for the posters and the notebook paper. Some of Ken's most welcome chocolate rolled in a couple of days ago too, but he and Wad are both extremely tight with information about themselves.

Had a wonderful time today, flying up thru holes between cumulus clouds and diving thru and around them.

You ask me to tell you about France. France the picturesque, France the artistic, and France the beautiful are still here (in this part of the country), but all of France and the French people say "My man-power is gone"; or rather they don't say so, because they don't have to, -- the fact is patent.

Jan. 1, 1918

Forget when I last wrote. Anyway, nothing unusual has happened, except that they are going to send some men to a more advanced school and I'm not on the list because they want to keep me doing work here. So I'm pestering the life out of them to put someone else in my job, which really requires no special qualifications, and put me on the next list. I hope to put it through.

I have been getting a lot of flying lately, sometimes as much as two hours a day; hence my eagerness to progress to the next step, for I have now had considerable flying experience, though a good deal less than many. Yesterday I went up and stayed in the air for 2 hours 10 minutes, reaching at one time an altitude of 5000 meters. I can see that I'll need a lot of sleep at the front, for I was awfully tired last night. (Note: No wonder -- 15800 ft. altitude without oxygen supply.)

I enclose some photos which will interest you, also a letter for G.M. (Note: His grandmother, then aged 75). I am short of envelopes, and stole this one.

A few days ago I received orders placing me on flying status from Oct. 15th. This entitles me to 25% extra pay, making a total of $225.- per month. It is too much for me, and I am considering sending it to you if I can find some cheap and safe method of so doing. Probably duplicate check would be the best method. It's a cinch I ought not to use it all, and if I send part of it to you it can be spent or invested as you see fit.

(To his grandmother)

Air Service, A.E.F., France
Jan. 1, 1918

Your latest volume, "Jokes and Journeys" is unquestionably the hit of the season. My roommate Ham Coolidge and I had a real Christmas party on the morning of the 25th, lying in bed until 8:00, then building a fire in our stove and opening all our Xmas packages. Your volume was the first thing I struck, and after I had reached the Indian picture the fit became so violent that I was almost useless the rest of the day. You certainly are the original literary jester, and for cleverness you easily "bring home the hand-embroidered fire hose" ("take the prize is too hackneyed an expression).

Flying -- at least this behind-the-lines flying -- is certainly a wonderful stunt; and even after I have been doing real war flying I don't think I'll get tired of it. It is certainly the way to see the country, and for leaving the world and its cares behind in more ways than one it can't be beat. If I am still on deck instead of pushing up the daisies when this job is finished, You'll have to take a ride with me. Now don't get scared, because it's just as safe as motoring with father, and anyone who is sport enough to walk fences, fight over open windows on trains and "montez, montez, madame a la train" would certainly never refuse to see the world as she is saw every day by buzzards. So try to stay alive for a long time yet, and I'll do the same; then we can have a real lark.

France, Jan. 8, 1918

By repeated requests to be relieved from swivel-chair duty at the school, I succeeded in gaining my point, and Sunday moved to this field a few miles away from the main camp. (Note: Field 5, known as St. Valentin.) Here I will receive flying training of a more advanced nature for probably a couple of weeks and will then be sent to an aerial gunnery school before going to the F. It isn't nearly so comfortable here as it was at the other camp, for there I was on the training staff and had a double room with Ham, while here a lot of us flying officers are in barracks. But I really am glad to be with a gang once more with nothing to do but learn to fly better, instead of being bothered with a lot of duties; and we are plenty comfortable enough.

The weather has been unspeakable since I reached here, but the blizzard we had last night has calmed some, so we may have some flying tomorrow.

You asked me what I thought of the Red Cross and YMCA. From what I have seen of them at the main camp, they are efficiently run and of great value to us. Over here we find that amusements and little luxuries are a great treat, and both those organizations are providing both those things at the main camp. The R.C. is also building an extensive bathing plant which is sorely needed. Of course I can't say much about the efficiency of these outfits until I go up to the real job, but behind the lines it seems to be O.K.

Jan. 11, 1918.

This is great training I am getting here; the only trouble is that we do so much flying that it is hard to shave, brush teeth and do those necessary things between times. It is a great feeling to be doing one's duty and enjoying it more than anything ever. The best fun of all is to fly with several other machines, the nearest so close that you can read figures 3 inches high on it.

One of the men I am flying with is the brother of the Cedric Snook who married Edith Clapp. He furnishes considerable amusement.

The other day I received a dandy package of eats from Mr. Bruce and his two daughters. It surely went to the spot.

In a couple of days I ought to be thru here and ready to go to the gunnery school, but whether the orders will come through so soon is another matter. In the mean time, one of the best type of machines has been assigned to my exclusive use as long as I stay here. It is nice to have an exclusive machine, especially a brand new one like this one, because then you know that no one else has strained it in the air, bumped it hard on the ground, or overworked the motor. Also it will be fun to have charge of the care of the machine.

(To Mrs. F. W. Stephenson of San Francisco, friend of his parents)
Air Service, A.E.F.
France, Jan. 13, 1918

Just a few days ago your delightful package of eats arrived at a camp not far from here, and I had the pleasure of flying over and bringing it back in my machine. It certainly is a treat, and as a Christmas present can't be beaten. I thank you and Mrs. Macon and Mr. Bruce very much for it.

My flying training has been a great experience -- more fun than I ever had before. And now we have almost finished, and are to be sent up to the real job in a couple of weeks; that will be the greatest experience ever, while it lasts, and we hope to be able to do our share of building Bill Hohenzollern's gallows before we get picked off.

Air Service, A.E.F.
France, Jan. 20, 1918.

Your Xmas boxes have not yet arrived, but that is nothing to be alarmed at, for just yesterday I received Mother's letters of the 12th and 16th of November. I only hope they won't come just before I move somewhere, for I would have a hard time taking them with me, I have so much baggage already.

Our orders to move have been expected for several days, but have so far failed to come through. In the mean time we are getting about an hour and a half in the air per day, and sometimes more. Last Monday, I ticked off 3 hours 20 minutes, and was almost glad when it rained the next day. During the last few days we have been taking a form of training which can be dangerous at times but which is quite necessary if we want to be able to meet the Hun pilots on even terms. We are forbidden to describe our method of training so I can't say much about it. Needless to say, it is the best fun we've had yet. (Note: believe this refers to mock combat, perhaps with camera guns.)

The coldest part of the winter seems to be over, and we are back in mud again. The snow has been entirely gone for over a week, -- which makes it much easier on the eyes when flying.

Here is a list of stuff I think Wad ought to <u>bring with him from the States</u> when he comes:

1. Regulation locker trunk.
2. Bedding roll with good quality blankets and folding cot.
3. Heavy duty boots.
4. Rubber hip boots.
5. Trench coat (expensive but worth it).
6. Some warm glove combination (Abercrombie & Fitch makes a heavy mitten with leather gloves to cover it, which is good even for flying in cold weather.)
7. Lot of heavy sox.
8. Two or three sweaters.
9. Pair of warm slippers.

10. Several extra tubes of tooth paste (I could use a few myself).
11. Complete sewing outfit.

Don't be afraid to bring a lot of baggage. It's lots of trouble and you must keep your eye on it, particularly when you land in Europe, but you can't tell where you might live, and you ought to have everything you need right with you. It is wrong to suppose that you can get the above articles better on this side. Perhaps you can in England, but not in France.

Grand Hotel de France
Arcachon, Feb. 3, 1918

About 8 days ago, six of us received orders to proceed to the French school of aerial fire to learn how to shoot from an Airplane. We had a day in Paris to do a little shopping, and arrived here last Tuesday. We are living at this very comfortable but reasonable hotel, and take a truck at 6:30 each morning to the school, which is about 10 miles away on the shore of C----- Lake. (Note: Etaing de Cazeaux. The other five men in the group were Thorne Taylor, John Wentworth, Bill Thompson, Bob Moore, and (perhaps) Monk Hunter). After eating French breakfast there, we are met by our special instructor, who conducts us to whatever lectures or practical work may be on the schedule. We have done some flying, but will not do any shooting until tomorrow. C---- is a beautiful place to fly. As soon as you have climbed a couple of hundred meters, you can see two lakes, the estuary at Arcachon, and several miles of Atlantic coast. The only trouble is that there is no landing field in sight except the aerodrome itself, so if you have a "panne de moteur" when you are out of gliding distance, there is nothing to land on except pine trees. This would not be very pleasant, although it has been done many times without injury to the pilot. But this condition of the terrain keeps pilots from wandering away and having "pannes de chateau", -- a form of diversion which consists in conveniently having a "forced" (?) landing near a prosperous looking chateau in time for lunch or just before sunset. A "pilote" is always welcome at a chateau, but I have never tried it out.

The machines we have been using are pretty punk, for they have seen a lot of service. It's good practice, though, for they are plenty of strong enough, but the wings are warped a little, and they do all sorts of peculiar things. When we start shooting tomorrow we'll get really good ones.

(Note: The writer recalls that the landing field was of smooth sandy-clay soil, no grass, and in order to keep the airplanes' tail skids from chewing it up, they had been fitted with broad metal runners instead of the usual sharp points. This made the runout after landing somewhat longer and more difficult to control; however, we thought we were getting to be pros, so anyone who made a "cheval de bois" was stuck for a bottle of champagne the next non-flying day.)

Arcachon, Feb. 10, 1918

The last week has been awfully busy but intensly interesting, and I hope that what I have learned will help me a lot when I get to the front. This aerial shooting is a pretty difficult proposition, but it makes it a lot easier to have someone teach you and give you pointers. Also, it is advantageous to try it for the first time on targets that can't shoot back.

In about a week we ought to be ready for the front, but we haven't received any orders or even dope as yet. Most of the class that were here before us are to be utilized as advanced instructors for a while, but we hope that they were sufficient in number so that they won't have to use us for that.

I am hearing from some of the boys who are over here now. Ken Culbert is an aerial observer, and Rummy Taylor is studying to become one. (Note: College roommates.)

This is a mighty nice place here, and we are enjoying our stay a lot. This afternoon was our only time off during the week, so we started out by taking a carriage ride along the shore of the bay. Then we rowed a boat in the harbor for a while, and when that was over, five of us hired bicycles and rode around town in formation, just as we fly sometimes.

(To Mrs. Phoebe A. Hearst, California)

Air Service, A.E.F.
France, Feb. 28, 1918

I wish to thank you for the box of "Huyler's" which you sent me for Christmas. Its journey was long and ardous, but it succeeded in swimming across the Atlantic and penetrating many red tape entanglements, and arrived here, in good condition, about two weeks ago. Such luxuries are indeed welcome to a man who has lived for some months in army style, and the candies were greatly enjoyed by myself and friends.

I am now waiting, for a few days, for my orders to go to the front. My flying training has come to an end without mishap, and within a week I hope to find myself face to face with the Real Job; there I expect to begin to learn my business, and, I hope, to make a creditable performance.

Air Service, A.E.F.
France, Feb. 28, 1918

I finished the course at C----- about 12 days ago. We had to hang around about 5 days waiting for orders, and our C.O. gave us a pass for 2 days. We went to Pau, a beautiful winter resort at the foot of the Pyrenees. A week ago, our orders came, directing us to proceed to the 3rd Aviation Instruction Center, -- you know where that is. We had permission to delay 2 days en route, and I wanted to visit Wad, but the

great oaf didn't write me until a month after he landed, and he didn't give me any clue as to where he is located, so I couldn't find him. I spent 2 days and a little money in Paris, then came down here. My bank is sending the Crocker Bank $200.- to be credited to you. I can't possibly spend my $2700.- a year, or at least I shouldn't, and I would rather have it used or invested at home than sitting in a bank over here.

Upon arrival here, we received the glad tidings that we are to leave for the Front within a week, so we are all satisfied.

The box of chocolate for the 5 kids arrived when I was at C-----, and has been attended to. The other one is still enroute or perdu, so it may not turn up in time. Thanks for the knitted stuff.

I have a sneaking hunch that Wad is located near here somewhere, and that if I could find out, I might be able to fly over and give him a hop. A girl that he knows has written a girl who lives near the camp to look me up, which she did when I was away. I don't know her name or where she lives, but one of the other officers knows her by sight, and he is trying to find out for me. Imagine my looking for a strange French lady to find out where my brother is!

Air Service, A.E.F.
France, March 10, 1918.

We left the 3rd A.I.Centre 6 days ago, and after a 36 hour ride on a ridiculously slow train, we arrived at the 1st Pursuit Organization Centre. Here we are to make our first few trips over the lines, and be organized into squadrons when we have had a little more experience. This place is great. With reference to a famous work of art which the Huns have partially destroyed, we are as far from it as you are from G.M. plus 6 miles, in the same direction as you are from Diablo. (Note: This was an uncensorable attempt to tell them we were about 20 miles south of Rheims. The name of the place was Villeneuve-les-Vertus.) Nothing particularly exciting has happened yet, though we have heard some artillery action and have seen the white shrapnel bursts of A.A. shells fired at a Boche who flew over near us. In a couple of weeks, when the moon is good, I suppose we'll be bombed some night.

Due to some delays in arrival of materials, we shall probably not be able to fly over the lines for a week or 10 days. Two excellent pilots, one of them an ace (Note: Lufbery), have been transferred from the French army to the American; they will lead our groups over the lines for the first few times and show us how it is done. No one could ask for a better start than that. Also, some crack French escadrilles are located here and will operate on the same sector until we are competent to take over part of it.

Air Service, A.E.F.
March 25, 1918.

I don't remember when I wrote last, but I have a sneaking hunch it was quite a while ago.

Up to day before yesterday I was thoroughly disgusted with the outlook of things, for I had been "setting" for 2 weeks and had nothing to do. But on Saturday I was assigned to a plane, and since then I have spent most of my waking hours in the hangar. My three mechanics have put a compass, a clock and an altimeter in the machine under my direction, and they spent most of yesterday fitting on some sights and timing the mitrailleuse to shoot thru the propeller. In an hour or two I expect to test the sights and take the machine up for a few minutes to see whether it is properly aligned. Then it will be ready for business, unless something else turns up. This is a slow game; everything requires such careful attention, and all sorts of things to be done keep showing up from time to time.

Towns in our vicinity have been severly bombed, but so far the Boche hasn't come after us. I can't remember whether I told you that a French plane bumped its wheels against the roof six feet over my head and smashed itself all to pieces, without hurting anyone in the building or doing more to the pilot than break his nose.

These Boches are certainly a clever bunch in military matters. Who would have thought, when all the world was yelling about their cutting down fruit trees a year ago, that they did it so as to prevent the Allied troops from hiding when they made their big shove last week? I hope I can help to lick them when they make their expected drive in this sector.

Air Service, A.E.F.
March 28, 1918.

At last I have Started the job. Last night after supper, Major Lufbery told Eddie Rickenbacker and myself that he would take us over the lines this morning if the weather permitted. The morning was beautifully clear, and after a leisurely breakfast we crawled into our warm duds and took to the air, at about 9 o'clock.

Major Lufbery led, with Rick and myself above and behind him on the right and left respectively. With these fast and powerful little machines it didn't take us long to reach the lines at an altitude of 4000 meters. Then we turned to the left and patrolled up and down two times on a front of about 30 kilometers. Our planes were scarcely ever flying in a straight line; we were continually banking and turning from one side to the other, in order to see at all angles and to make it harder for the anti-aircraft battery which shot at us occasionally. The sector was so calm it was almost dead. I could see no artillery activity at all; merely two intricate systems of trenches with a pock-marked area of variable width between them. I didn't spend much time looking at the ground, but now and then I would glance at a spot where a few marks on the ground indicated the site of a village blown to atoms.

The Major saw one Boche flying very low, but my untrained eye didn't even observe that. Once I saw two black specks out of the corner of my eye, and glanced back quickly, thinking they were planes; but they widened out into large clouds of black smoke, and I knew that they were only two A.A. shells which had exploded about 600 meters away from me. I'm sorry we didn't see any Boches, but I guess we will next time, and anyway it is something to have been one of the first two American-trained chasse pilots over the lines.

I am pretty sleepy this afternoon. We stayed between 4500 and 5000 meters for an hour, and I'm not used to it yet.

1st Pursuit Group
Air Service, A.E.F.
April 6, 1918.

I am having an unwelcome vacation. Last Sunday a spark from a barrack stove blew onto one of our canvas hangars and set the roof on fire. There were very few men on hand, as we were moving, and most of the mechanics had left, and we had a hard time saving the planes. As many planes as you have sons, times 6 divided by 9 (Note: the writer must have been extremely censorship-conscious), were completely destroyed, and burning pieces of the roof fell around us as we were pushing mine out, setting fire to three of the four wings but leaving the rest of the bird intact. It was sent here on a truck, and I am now having new wings put on, but it is a slow job, because the French spare parts never fit, and always have to be drilled, shaved, and coaxed into place. That's the way they build planes, -- one at a time. The individual machines are, of course, unbeatable, but that doesn't overbalance the lack of numbers.

I flew one of the other planes down to this new post, and it was a great trip. I can tell you where it is if you know where I was the last time I wrote -- just after my first trip over the lines. We took a southeasterly direction and with the wind behind us travelled almost 160 MPH. In half an hour we landed at this place, which is on top of a ridge looking east at a river. We are almost directly west of the place where mother rang the cathedral bells in 1905, about 180 kilometers. (Note: the airstrip, carved out of the woods, was at Epieds, between St. Dizier and Neufchateau.) We are just as far behind the lines as we were at the last place.

The Xmas box hasn't arrived yet, but mother's letter of Dec. 4 just came today, so there is still hope. The letter had been to my autumn camp twice, and twice to the aerial gunnery school.

Things are looking bad up around Amiens. I wish we had gone there instead of coming here, but of course men who haven't yet learned how to see planes before they are visible to the untrained eye wouldn't be much use.

The observation squadron in which Ken Culbert is an observer is stationed a few miles away (Note: at Amanty), and I saw him 2 days ago. Part of my job will be to keep Boche planes from disturbing him when he is working. Isn't that great?

Air Service, A.E.F.
France, April 13, 1918

We have moved again, not far, just a few miles northeast. If you will look up the location of our walking trip in 1911 before father got sick, you will find a river which has its mouth at the point where our walk began. I am just outside of T---, which is on that river, not so very far from the lines. (Note: Gengoult airfield, on the outskirts of Toul.)

At last we have equipment, machine guns, and good liaison with the French, and day after tomorrow we begin steady work. That means going over the lines every other day, and being ready for any "alertes" which may be telephoned in on the alternate days, -- such as Boche planes coming over to take pictures, day-bombing raids, etc. We have 5 Lafayette veterans with us, including Major Lufbery (the owner and manipulator of the best pair of eyes in existence) and Capt. James Norman Hall, who Luf says to be a comer. He is a writer of no mean caliber, having written "Kitchner's Mob" and "High Adventure"; the latter are the best and truest air stories written, and have been published in the Atlantic Monthly. (Note: The other three Lafayette veterans were Dave Peterson, Walter Lovell (?), and Ken Marr.) On his second trip over the lines, Capt. Hall attacked a biplace from above, mistaking it for a monoplace, and got a bullet through his lungs. He fainted before reaching the ground, and was lucky enough to dive into a trench. The wings caught the sides of the trench, and broke his fall enough to save his life. He will fight anything, but LUfbery says he has developed an unerring judgement in picking and timing his attack. There isn't any pilot in this squadron that isn't just itching to get started.

Incidentally we have wonderful quarters -- cement buildings with rooms for two, and a building full of shower baths with a quick heating apparatus. No mud, good roads, fascinating country, and beaucoup Boches. Can't beat it.

Air Service, A.E.F.
France, Apr. 15, 1918

It was a great war yesterday. On Saturday, Major Huffer informed the French Aviation, under whom this squadron is working, that we would be ready to start regular patrols and alerts on the 14th. Alan Winslow and I were on schedule to be on alert from 6 to 10 a.m. At 6 we had our planes wheeled out, and tested the motors to make sure they were running O.K.

The first 2½ hours were slow, but then things began to happen so quickly that we could hardly keep track of them. At 8:45 the telephone rang, and the message was that 2 Boche planes had been sighted some 15 miles away, headed this way. At 8:50 I took off, and had made a round of the field at 500 meters altitude when Winslow got into the air. He was to lead, and when he reached 200 meters I was just getting into position behind him. It was quite misty. All at once he turned, and I saw him chase a plane which wasn't over 300 m. high. It had black crosses on it! I heard him shoot, and they both went out of sight under my wings. I banked up 90 degrees and turned, to get a view below so as to go help Winslow if necessary, and it was lucky I did, for just as I turned I heard the pop-pop-pop of a machine gun behind me, and there was another Boche shooting at me. For some reason or other I thought his tail was turned toward me as he shot, and the thought "Biplace, keep under him" flashed into my brain. He turned out afterwards to be an Albatross monoplace, but I had guessed wrong, and instead of getting above him, which would have been easier, I kept below him, manoeuvring so as to try to get under his tail without letting him point toward me or get a shot at me from a broadside. In a biplace, you see, the gunner-passenger can shoot through a 180-degree arc behind the wings above the tail, and through large arcs down at the sides; while the pilot can shoot to the front by aiming his plane just as we do. It took over a minute to manoeuvre into a position behind and under his tail without exposing myself to his fire (I thought), but I finally found myself right under him. Then I pulled my nose straight up into the air and let him have the bullets, and I think he got some in his motor, for I saw some tracers hitting his nose. The next thing I knew, he was diving at about 45 degrees, and I was behind and above him but behind his tail. Then I got a good aim, pulled the trigger, and held on to it. Two or three tracers hit him, and after about 50 rounds had been fired a streak of flame came shooting out of his fuselage near the motor. I ceased firing, and watched him land and crash in a ploughed field, his plane a mass of flame and wreckage. The pilot had had sense enough to unfasten his belt, and was thrown clear of the machine, escaping with some bad burns and broken bones. Winslow had shot his Boche down, it landed and turned over in a ploughed field on the other side of the aerodrome. I was so excited that I was afraid to land until I had made a tour of the field. (Note: From takeoff to landing, the Winslow and Campbell flight lasted only 4½ minutes.)

When I rolled up to the hangar, everybody who hadn't run to the fallen Boches was on hand to haul us out of our planes and give us a slap on the back. (Note: the writer recalls that his mechanic Corporal Prince, forgetting military custom, shouted "That's the stuff, Lieutenant old kid!"). I ran over to my victim, (only 500 meters from the hangars), but they had already sent him to a hospital, and what was left of the plane was being rapidly torn into souvenirs by French and American soldiers. I got a few pieces, though. Winslow's plane wasn't badly damaged, and he got 2 Bosch magnetos, the spark plugs, and a splendid altimeter and compass.

The remains of the two planes were taken to T--- and exhibited in the main square yesterday. Al and I had to go down to be stared at while the band played yesterday afternoon. We were informed that a

French General will be around in a day or two to pin on a Croix de Guerre with palm. Not bad luck, the whole thing. Our squadron will now be able to get anything it needs from either the French or the Americans.

April 21, 1918

Enclosed is a picture of what was left of the Boche plane. A study of the wreck proved it to be, not an Albatross, as was Winslow's, but a Pfalz, about which I enclose a clipping. Under separate cover I am sending an 8" x 10" enlargement of a better photo of the wreck.

The victory was largely due to good luck, but was very gratifying and has given me a great deal of confidence.

However, I still have to learn how to see things over the lines. Yesterday I went up with Capt. Peterson, and we saw two Boche observation planes just across the lines. Pete led me across thru a barrage of antiaircraft shells, which sounded very loud even above the roar of the motor, and we caught up with them about 5 kilometers the other side of the lines. One of the principles drummed into young pilots is that they must never attack unless the patrol leader does, for he may see planes that they don't, so when he circled above the Boches I stayed right with him, and followed him home when he came. Didn't I kick myself when he told me, after landing, that he had hoped I would attack, but couldn't do it himself because his gun was jammed? (Note: At this time the squadron's planes were equipped with only one machine gun each; the second gun per plane was not received and installed until about June 7.) I surely would have done it if I had known, for the intoxication of danger had keyed me up for anything, and I was just itching for a scrap. I want to bring down a Hun on his own side of the lines, too; it is more of an achievement even if the victor doesn't get credit for it because of lack of witnesses. But don't think I mean to rush in blindly; the game isn't played that way. Nerve is necessary, but the head picks out the time to use it.

On Wednesday, a French Major appeared and decorated Winslow and myself with the Croix de Guerre with a palm (I'll buy an extra one and send it to you.) The French pilots of this centre lined up with the Americans and the French Major read the citation by the general commanding the --th Army, as follows:

"Le L-eutenant Douglas Campbell: Remarquable pilote de chasse. (Bunk!) Le 14 Avril, a abbatu un avion ennemi dans nos lignes apres un combat aussi rapide que brillant."

Then he stalked up, affixed the hardware to my heaving bosom, and wrung my hand off. He didn't kiss me on both cheeks; apparently they give so many C. de G.'s that they save the osculation for the higher medals. Thank God he didn't, for a movie man was there, and throughout the ceremony he played soft music on his crank organ. After the party, I must needs pose for said guy in plane, infront of plane, shaking hands with Winslow, and all that hero stuff. It may appear in the Pathetic Weekly in a few weeks. (Note: Pathé Newsreel).

I am informed that both the Hun planes are to be sent to the States to help in the Liberty Loan Campagin. Perhaps you can arrange to see them. We received hordes of reporters early in the week, so I suppose the papers will be full of bull. I didn't talk much, but I suppose the "Examiner" will come out with "Astronomer's Son Wins Sky Battle" or some such hooey. I attempted to cable you the same day, but so much red tape was involved that I gave it up. Hope some reporter didn't scare you by asking for my life history over the phone.

Air Service, A.E.F.
April 28, 1918

I have had two fights this week, but both were unsuccessful. The first one I should have had; he threw out a black smoke bomb and I stopped shooting because I thought he was on fire, -- a foolish thing to do. Then he got away from me. The second I chased about 5 km. inside his own lines but couldn't overtake. The next day I saw another one over the lines and went after him, but turned around when I discovered myself 4 km. behind the lines at an altitude of only 1000 meters with a strong wind behind my back, -- nearly out of gliding distance. To me the risk of the motor stopping seems worse than that of getting shot.

Friday night I talked to Wad over the phone, having received a letter from him that afternoon which informed me that he was stationed 25 miles from here. We were 8 miles apart during the first week of April, but didn't know it. The telephone connection was very poor, so we didn't have much of a talk. He left yesterday morning for the French front, where he is to observe their methods of doing things in his line; he returns in a week, and will be at the First Corps School for a month. He will try to come here next Sunday. The first thing he wanted to know was whether I could take him for a flight if he comes here. I think I can arrange it, though we have no two-seaters in the squadron.

The weather has been pretty wretched lately; haven't had a perflectly clear day yet. I hope we shall get one soon because the Hun birds will surely come out then. Yesterday afternoon I flew along well inside their lines at 3500 meters for half an hour, hoping some of them would come after me, but they wouldn't come out. You notice I have much more confidence in my eyes than I did ten days ago, though there is still lots or room for improvement. Twice already I have been sent out as leader of a patrol of three.

The other day, when it was raining, a few of us went out to visit some of the artillery batteries near the lines. The day before, they had been catching hell, and it had rained during the night and all day, so we got a good idea of the discomforts of their life. But Gosh! but the pilots have it soft! Our work is all sport.

Air Service, A.E.F.
France, May 12, 1918

For the last week this place has been pretty dead -- raining all the time, no flying. About 10 days ago five of us got into a royal scrap with 5 Boche planes, and Capt. Peterson sent one of the Huns hurtling down thru space, but Chapman got himself into a corner and was brought down in flames. Just a week ago Capt. Hall got into a fight and was seen spinning down. But Ed Green saw him straighten out further down, and we are pretty sure that his motor got put out of business by a bullet, and that he spun down so as not to get shot, for he was out of gliding distance of the lines. Let's hope so, anyway, until we get definite news. (Note: Actually, a dud A.A. shell hit Hall's motor and stuck there, making his plane so out of balance that he spiralled into the ground and broke a few bones; he was a prisoner until after the Armistice.)

Hall's "High Adventure" is coming out in book form this spring, I think. If he is all right and lives thru the treatment he gets (his wounds of last June didn't leave him in too good shape) we will see <u>some</u> book after the war.

Wad is back from the front, and was supposed to come over from G------- today, but it is after supper and he hasn't showed up. Eleventh hour interruption, I suppose.

Alert House, "Hat in the Ring" Squadron
(don't use in address)
Air Service, A.E.F.
May 20, 1918.

Business is picking up. Wad came up here from G------ day before yesterday in the evening and stayed over until yesterday after supper. He is looking awfully well. Just to show my brother what I could do, I went out yesterday morning and got me another Boche. We met over the lines north of here and had a nice fight. I soon succeeded in getting on his tail and started pumping him full of lead. It was an L.V.G. biplace, so of course the observer started shooting back at me; but I think killed him soon, for he stopped shooting before I got very close to him. I kept on shooting, and was about 15 meters from him when his right wing crupmled up, and he fell from 4500 meters, hitting about a mile inside our lines. I tried to follow him down and watch him hit, but he went thru a cloud, and was going so much faster than I was that he had hit before I got thru the cloud. Realizing that it was up to me to strike for home and country, I struck for home at once, and announced my exploit by shouting my head off as I glided into the home field. The fall of the Boche had already been reported over the phone, but nobody knew who had got him until they <u>heard</u> me land.

Wad, Thorne Taylor, Rick, Major Huffer and I immediately got into a touring car and rode out to the front to look him over. His map showed that he was trying to photograph a certain battery, and I assisted him considerably, for the plane hit 50 meters from said battery and spread over a piece of ground 10 meters square. The pilot

and observer were officers wearing the Iron Cross, and both were decorated with bullet holes in the head. I picked up a lot of souvenirs; the camera and plates were smashed, but a beautiful 4-inch Zeiss lens was uninjured, and will probably be used by the observation squadron of which Ken Culbert is a member.

The plane hit in a French sector, and an enthusiastic old Commandant must needs have the "heros" and his brother and friends dine with him. An excellent dinner in a little arbor in a wood 1 mile from the trenches, and trust the French to bring out a bottle of excellent Moet et Chandon to celebrate the occasion! The Commandant and I exchanged about 20 compliments during our stay at his post.

One never has good luck all the time. Major Lufbery tackled a biplace yesterday morning and was brought down in flames. I wouldn't believe it for a long time; he is always so sure of himself and goes at it so scientifically. To those who knew him well (I used to play bridge with him quite often in the evenings) he was a real man and a lovable character. There was nothing he liked better than to help us green pilots just as much as possible. It is hard to lose him.

Major Huffer got a French pilot to take Wad up for a little hop in a biplace machine, and I guess he enjoyed it a good deal.

I had 4 combats with biplaces on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. The one on Saturday I am sure I hit, but didn't think I brought it down, and had to beat it because I was alone and some Huns were coming. It seems, however, that a machine came down at that place and time so it is possible that I will be credited with it, making 3 altogether. Not bad for a greenhorn, but I'm not swell-headed -- yet.

Air Service, A.E.F.
France, June 2, 1918

Gosh! I haven't written you for almost 2 weeks! I've been too busy making the world safe for Democrats. (Note: A gag current among servicemen at the time, parodying President Woodrow Wilson's solemn pronouncement about "making the world safe for democracy.")

The first week of the two was pretty dud, for though the weather was fine the Boche stayed in his nest. But the last week has been a corker! On Monday John Wentworth and I went on a voluntary patrol. leaving the ground just after breakfast. As we usually do when the sun is on our side of the lines, we climbed to a fairly high altitude rather far inside our lines, twisting, turning, and alternately raising and lowering the nose of the plane so as to see better. Flying like a ship in a heavy sea, and always going up, up - - -

Ah! White (French) bursts of anti-aircraft shells over the lines in the middle of our sector! We made a bee line for the place, making a couple of turns now and then to make sure that there were no Boche planes at higher altitude than the bursts. And now, getting

close to our objective, we rivet attention on that part of the sky. There is a little yellow-jacket, with black wings and orange body, circling about among the shrapnel bursts. That's an Albatross, and there's another, and a third, and two further down -- five in all.

The nearest one of the top three is the best target, for he is separated from the rest, and possibly he doesn't see me. Down goes my nose for a dive, with the motor singing with increased speed and the wires whistling. I'm 300 meters from him now, and he doesn't ---- yes, he does see me, and puts himself into a spin before I shoot. Now I'm in a vertical dive over him, and put a few shots in his direction although it's not much of a chance to hit, but don't follow him too far, old boy, because those other two are just waiting for that. I pull out of the dive, and my speed carries me up the two or three hundred meters that I lost; there are the other two of the upper three, just turning to run into Germany. I'm pretty close now, and the rear one turns over on his back in a pretty renversement and dives. I guess I'm supposed to follow him, so the other one can turn and dive on me, but I'll just keep chasing the one that's left, and see what happens; John is right back there, and will take care of the first one if he tries to come up at me. Getting within 50 meters, I lean on the trigger and see tracers hitting the Boche machine. He turns and dives at the same time, and I try to keep the tracers hitting him, but I have to break all the principles of aerial flight to do it. Now he's spinning, and I don't know where the other Boche are, nor where John is, but those other two Allied planes that I saw just before the fight must be here by this time, so I'll climb up and out of the melee to get a comprehensive view of it. The comprehensive view shows 4 Boches whipping their Mercedes motors so they will carry them home a little faster, and 3 Americans running after them hell-bent for election. The fifth Boche seems to be --- for the love of Mike what's that down there?
It looks like a piece of Boche wing fluttering down, and there's another piece, and way down there the body with a couple of stumps of wing on it, giving the pilot the fastest and shortest and most unfortunate ride he ever had, though probably he has been shot and doesn't know it. That last one I shot at must have been rendered unconscious and have gone into a spin with full motor, which sould easily overstrain the wings. The Boches are too low and too far back now, and the Americans have turned back, so I pick up John and we go home.

Tuesday morning Rick and I found 6 enemy planes and attacked them. Four of them ran away, and we fired at one of the others simultaneously, making him spin down and crash into a wood on the German side of the trenches. The other one tried to play decoy for the 4, who were waiting behind their lines, but we didn't bite.

Wednesday morning I had the pleasure of saving an English plane and the lives of pilot and gunner. A group of English bombers had gone far into Germany before daylight, and one of them got separated from the bunch on the way home. I was patrolling the lines at 8 a.m., and saw a plane coming out of Germany (everything beyond the lines is called "Germany" by us) with two Boches on his tail. He was in a bad way, and I dived on the enemy just in time, for the pilot was already wounded. The Huns ran away. That afternoon I received a very nice message of thanks from the British squadron.

Thursday morning about four of us had a wonderful mix-up with 5 Huns, but without results. Friday, I found a 2 biplace observation planes this side of our lines and had a slick fight with one of them. We manoeuvred all over each other for about 5 minutes, and the gunner shot away all his ammunition without hitting me. Then I brought him down inside our third line trenches. The gunner was a true sport. He tore up his map and stood up to take his medicine.

Yesterday I didn't fly.

The infantry observer who reported the fall of the plane Rick and I got together, balled up his report, so we may not get credit for it, but he's a dead gone Hun anyway, and besides I have 5 official victories to my credit without it.

One of our boys was pretty badly wounded on Monday. (Note: Willard D. "Jud" Hill). A bullet of the armor-piercing type split up on the seat of his plane and tore a big hole in the flesh of the thigh. He landed all right just this side of the trenches and was taken right to a hospital. He's getting on, but will be laid up for some time. He was lucky, though; there were about 25 bullet holes in his machine. We figured that one of them missed his cheek by 2 inches.

Since I last wrote, Ken Culbert has been killed in an accident.

Air Service, A.E.F.
France, June 6th

Yesterday was not my lucky day. At 9 a.m. I took to the air, and had been up only 10 minutes when I saw a Boche far in our territory at a great altitude. It took about 15 or 20 minutes to climb up to him and then we had a fight. He was a biplace, but did some fine manoeuvring; and I did some rotten shooting, so between the two he got away. Then almost immediately I saw another machine of the same type at a high altitude, and went after him. Again it was a case of good manoeuvring in his part and poor shooting on mine, and we fought from 5200 meters all the way down to 500. He had a jam, apparently, about half way thru the fight, so just at the end I approached him from a dangerous angle. He had fixed the jam, however, and shot at me as I turned away, putting about 8 bullets in my machine. I heard a loud crashing sound and felt myself hit in the back; it appears that a bullet struck a wire just behind me, and one of the fragments lodged in the flesh of my lumbar regions.

Fortunately, it didn't disable me for flying, and I made a bee line for home, landing safely. Inside of half an hour the bullet had been located by X-ray. I kicked against taking ether, so they used cocaine for local anaesthesia, and I never felt a thing. The wound is perfectly clean, and they sewed it up tight.

Day before yesterday I had supper with Major Joe Flint, whose hospital is located 10 miles from our field. The hospital where I am is the best of the American Surgical Hospitals, and is a mile from our field. (Note: Evacuation Hospital No. 1, near village of Sebastopol, near Mesnil-la-Tour.) I am sleeping and eating well, and am as comfortable as could be expected with a hole in my back.

It is reported that the Boche who got me is down, but whether he fell or landed is uncertain. (Note: Landed, apparently with motor not functioning, in No Man's Land, and the artillery demolished the plane.)

Biarritz, France
July 12, 1918

I don't remember when I last wrote, except that it was a long time ago. On the 19th of June I left Base Hospital 15 for 3 weeks' sick leave, -- and "sick leave" has certainly proved to be an excellent name for it.

I spent almost two weeks and many francs in Paris, where for 10 days I had a deelightful time. Almost every morning I went to a place just outside the city where there are a lot of planes, and I flew quite a bit on Spads, which is the type of machine our Sqdn. will probably have when I get back. Then in the afternoon I would return to Paris and invariably meet old friends. Anybody who wants to see friends has only to sit in the "Crillon Bar" --- really a sort of men's club room, delightfully furnished, in the Hotel Crillon on the Place de la Concorde --- from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m., and he will meet most of the American officers in Paris, particularly Harvard men and pilots. It is really getting to be almost an institution; officers on leave in Paris drop in there every afternoon, not for the purpose of drinking, but to meet old acquaintances. I ran across Archie Roosevelt, two or three Harvard Classmates, Ken Smith, some Harvard Second Football team mates, and oodles of pilots that I hadn't seen since January. Vive le Crillon!

I was in the pink of condition and thinking about going back to the Sqdn. when I collected the 3-day grippe which is going the rounds, and spent a couple of days in bed. Then I packed myself off to Biarritz, and no sooner arrived here than a couple of young ptomaines dived on me out of a hors d'oeuvre or seomthing, and kept me in bed on a liquid diet for 4 days. I'm just getting up again. Now it will be 10 days before I'm fit to go back to the front, where one is comparatively safe. The Sqdn. has moved near where I was in March, and Ham Coolidge has at last got rid of his Issoudun testing job and joined us, so I am more anxious than ever to get back to work. I've been a liability for six weeks now, which is pretty rough on Uncle Sam's Liberty Funds, even if I have cost the Imperial German Government some $300,000.- (That's 10 pilots or observers at $25,000.- apiece, plus 6 machines).

Note: A few days later, when enroute to rejoin his Squadron, which was the 94th, in the 1st Pursuit Group, the writer was intercepted and given orders (to his infinite chagrin and disgust) to proceed to the United States to inspect the training of chasse (fighter) pilots there and make suggestions for improving it. Despite his efforts to shorten this mission, in which he soon found that he could accomplish little because the fault lay in the sluggish, underpowered aircraft then available for this training in the United States, red tape and Army bureaucracy kept him from returning to Europe until November, and he was crossing the Atlantic eastbound when the Armistice was signed.

So, although he did rejoin his beloved squadron for a few weeks in November/December, he did not succeed in again going

WHERE THE ACTION IS

POSTCRIPT ---------- AFTER THE ARMISTICE

94th Squadron, U. S. Air Service
France, November 30, 1918

Well, I certainly just squeaked over here by the skin of my teeth, I was assigned to the Mauretaina, to sail on the 9th, and at 11 o'clock on the 10th, just before the delayed sailing time, received orders to report to Hoboken for reassignment. An hour later I was back on the same boat again, having seen the right people at Hoboken (Note: The Commanding General's secretary), and we sailed at 1:00. Fairly nice trip to Liverpool, landing just a week later; then 2 days in rest camp in Winchester, and lost in fog in Channel for 36 hours, landing at Le Havre Thursday the 21st. (Note: Having learned that officers without troops at the rest camp would be the first to be sent back to the United States as space on ships became available, he disappeared from there in a raincoat without insignia, and traveled the rest of the way without orders on trains and the Southampton-Le Havre boat -- the British thought he looked French, and the Americans thought he was British, and the French didn't care). Paris that night.

Friday morning in Paris, who should I meet but Capt. Jimmy Hall, who had arrived from Germany the day before. Great reunion. Also saw some boys from the 1st Pursuit Group who told me they were near St. Mihiel and that my old squadron had been given the honor of being the only pursuit squadron assigned to the Army of Occupation. Well, only one thing for me to do! Took Friday night train to Bar-le-Duc (Note: Carefully avoiding any Military Police) where auto met me at 2:00 a.m. and took me to 1st P. Group. Saturday, while waiting for baggage to arrive, got a Spad and flew to Metz for lunch, passing over my old stamping ground. Funny sensation to fly over the country with nothing to do but look for landmarks. Metz is full of Boches.

Saturday morning, after arranging to have baggage taken on truck, was flown to my squadron at Longuyon in rear seat of Liberty plane, and dropped in on them like a bolt from the blue. As the machine was taxying across the field to tha hangars, I climbed out and straddled the fuselage, waving my cane in one hand and toothbrush in the other. Thorne Taylor recognized the maniac first and came tearing out, with Eddie Rickenbacker a close second. As it happened, the enlisted men were lined up for inspection, and they gave me a great cheer as I walked past. A great reception.

Since then the weather has been dud until today, so we haven't done much flying. Patrolled over Luxembourg today. Oh yes! Big Thanksgiving dinner day before yesterday, very successful.

About 4 days ago we went to a German air service park near Arlon (Belgium) and saw lots of Hun kites. The boys in the squadron say that during the last 3 months of the war the Hun planes of almost every type were better than our own corresponding types, but fortunately the pilots weren't so good. There were certainly some good-looking planes there. The French are receiving them in accordance with armistice terms, but we are trying to get a few specimens.

We hope to move to Treves soon. Our work isn't very exciting, but we have a wonderful gang of boys, and it's going to be a great trip I think. If Ham Coolidge hadn't been killed in October, it would be perfect. Awfully hard luck -- hit by a stray archie shell. Blew the wings off, and the fuselage fell in a mass of flames, hitting near Grand Pré.

SS "Adriatic", leaving Brest
Jan. 23, 1919

I believe I last wrote you a real letter about the 1st of December, at Longuyon. Since then I have had a tour de luxe of Western Europe. To begin with, at about Thanksgiving time we got a report that Washington had cabled for Rick, Jimmy Meissner and myself; in fact, the cable had been sent while I was still en route to France from N.Y. Immediately we got busy and arranged to have the orders pigeonholed all along the line, as the squadron was expected to move to Coblenz at any time. In the mean time, we were visiting Longwy, Luxembourg, Treves, and points in eastern Belgium almost at will, in the squadron Cadillac. Finally we found that we would not be able to stall much longer than Christmas, so when Dec. 21 arrived and the squadron was told it wouldn't move until after Christmas, the three of us piled into the Cadillac on the 22nd at 6 a.m. and started to visit Coblenz.

It was foggy when we started but cleared up later, and the ride was beautiful. Our route lay through Longwy and Luxembourg to Treves, from there through Wittlich over the hills to Alf, and from there to Cochem down the left bank of the beautiful Moselle, with its winding, vineyard-clothed and schloss-crowned canyon. After lunch at Cochem, we struck up onto the plateau at the left, and had a good road to Coblenz.

The next morning we started up the Rhine about 11:30, intending to go as far as Mayence and return. But lunch at the Goldnem Pfropfenzieher at Oberwesel took a long time, and we had tire trouble so we went only as far as Bingen, returning to Coblenz for a splendid dinner. The Rhine district has all the food it needs. Only white bread. eggs. butter. amd real coffee seems to be missing.

On the morning of the 24th we started on the return journey, stopping for some time at Treves (Note: now usually called Trier, except in French), where we were fortunate in meeting a Boche who had been a photographic observer flying over our sector last spring. I had hoped he would turn out to be someone I had had some fights with, but our combats didn't coincide.

Christmas day Jimmy Meissner and I pulled the best stunt yet. We were to leave the next morning, so we wanted to have a last fight on a good old Spad. At 11:00 we went up, expecting to go only as far as Luxembourg, as the ceiling was only 200 meters high. However, at Luxembourg the weather was better, and we spontaneously kept on toward Treves, landing at the drome of an American squadron there. At

Treves the sun was shining, and it was delightfully warm; and Christmas comes but once a year. So we had our tanks filled and proceeded to fly to Coblenz.

It was a wonderful trip. The grass in the valley of the Moselle near Treves was beautifully green, the river winding through it like a shining ribbon, and further on, where the river is in more of a canyon, there was snow on the plateaux on either side. In about 40 minutes we reached Coblenz, where we went wild and decided to show the inhabitants an exhibition of flying. We did climbing turns over Ehrenbreitstein, then pulled renversements, turning upside down over the river, and diving down low, so that we were only a few feet above the water on pulling out of the dive; we flew under a span bridge, dived at 3rd Army Headquarters, and circled church steeples. This took about 5 minutes, and then we started back to Treves. The walls of the Moselle canyon rise to a height of 3 or 4 hundred feet above the river in most places between Coblenz and Alf, and all that distance we were flying in the canyon, below the level of the plateaux on either side. Look at the map, and you will see that we had some nice curves to go around, in addition to circling castles and zooming over old ruins. Wonderful ride!

At Treves, while our tanks were being filled, I flew a German Fokker, and liked it tremendously.

The last leg of the journey was a bad one for me. I lost myself over the Duchy of Luxembourg, and it got dark. I decided to land while I could still see the ground. But I could find nothing but woods for 5 minutes, and it got very dark. Finally I spied a nice field near a town. At least I thought it was nice. After luckily dodging a totally unexpected smokestack and a likewise tall tree, I levelled off to land on the beautiful turf. A fence loomed up. Fortunately I had speed enough to hop it, and I settled on the ground, landing "comme une fleur". Just as I was congratulating myself on my expertness I crashed through two wire fences at about 40 miles per hour, and I found myself upside down, my head about 7 inches from the ground. Much humiliated, I unfastened the strap and flopped into a pool of thick black oil, crawled out, and stood up. The beautiful Spad was a total wreck but the wheels, high in the air, were spinning around in great glee. I laughed, smeared the oil off my face, and rode to Longuyon in a Ford, quite ignominiously but at the same time hugely enjoying my stupid blunder and the new experience of landing en somersault. (Note: So our hero and flying expert (?), at the end of what is still (1968) his last self-piloted flight on the continent of Europe, left his Avion upside down and in pieces in the middle of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.)

But I missed the Christmas dinner.

Jimmy got away with it all right. He got home and landed O.K. in the dark, but he scared himself to death, for he flew in a blizzard for several minutes, following a road he knew by flying 10 feet over the treetops. Aside from the treetops he could see nothing.

Leaving Longuyon on the 26th, we spend 3 or 4 days in Paris, going to Tours for a day to arrange for orders through England. This arranged, we left for Le Havre on Jan. 1 and crossed to Southampton during the night. Until the 14th we spent most of our time in London, though we went to York for a week end and did some flying there. London seemed to be made of dancing more than anything else.

On the 14th we went to Liverpool, and were rather disgruntled upon hearing that our ship had been put off for another six days. However, most of our money had run out, so we couldn't have remained in London anyway. During our 6 days we visited quaint old Chester, had tea with an M.P. at Birkenhead Park, and discussed Air Service scandal.

We sailed the 20th and stopped at Brest to pick up some homing American troops. Here we are; what next? That expresses very well my whole attitude on life since the armistice, and it has worked fairly well so far. We know we are ordered to Washington, that we are 2 months late, that we have had a stupendous joy ride, and that the future is as yet a blank.

When I recently rescued a bundle of 1917/18 handwritten letters from gathering dust in my attic and read them, it occurred to me that they might be of interest to members of my family, to some of my World War I colleagues who are still extant, and to a few friends, -- not because they tell the story of a period in my own life, but because they communicate something of the atmosphere and attitudes of that day and of the birth of the U.S.Air Force (then officially the Aviation Section, S ignal Corps) as a significant military force. And because, having been written within a few days after the events described, they are not just the imperfect and "improved" recollections of an old soldier fifty years later.